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29 January 2014

Miss Julaine Hedman
Headteacher
St Mark's Church of England Primary School
Harleyford Road
London
SE11 5SL

Dear Miss Hedman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- refine the success criteria in the action plan so that there are quantifiable achievement targets for all groups of pupils
- ensure that judgements about teaching examine a wide range of evidence about the typicality of teaching over time and the impact on pupils' progress.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a governor and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and I reviewed other documents about pupils' achievement and the monitoring of teaching. We made brief visits to lessons to talk to pupils and look at pupils' books.

Context

There have been no changes in staffing since the last inspection.

Main findings

You, your middle leaders and your governors have started to implement an improvement plan to address the areas requiring improvement from your recent inspection. The urgency for rapid improvement is being recognised and you are beginning to tighten up your monitoring of teaching and the quality of pupils' work in their books. However, we discussed that all teachers and teaching assistants must receive very detailed feedback about the typicality of their work over time and evidence for this needs to continue to go beyond lesson observations. During our visit to classes we saw some good questioning, good behaviour and pupils willing to learn. The level of challenge for more able pupils is not consistently high enough across the school.

You and your leaders of mathematics and English are establishing more regular scrutiny of pupils' work and of planning, teaching and marking. This is starting to give a more accurate picture of the quality of teaching. Senior leaders have a good understanding of how small group intervention work is supporting the progress of less able pupils and those with special educational needs. Teachers are marking pupils' books regularly and some teachers are providing pupils with 'next steps' to help them know what to improve and how. There remains inconsistency in the level of detail in the 'next steps' in some classes. This hinders pupils' ability to deepen what they know, understand and can do. Teachers regularly correct pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation and are helping pupils extend their writing skills. However, in mathematics there is little correction of poorly drawn bar charts and diagrams. There is insufficient detailed planning for developing writing in all subjects.

Some pupils know their targets for numeracy and literacy but others do not. Our joint scrutiny of pupils' books in Year 6 showed that for most there is lack of challenge in the marking for mathematics. There is better marking in literacy that expects pupils to respond to questions to explain their ideas. Your subject leader for mathematics has reviewed the quality of mathematics teaching, rightly judging that developing pupils' conceptual understanding and reasoning needs to be improved.

Leaders for English and mathematics are working well to check teachers' planning and teaching, and their impact on pupils' progress, to determine what teachers need to improve. Their summary reports provide an overview of key priorities and are a good starting point for planning well-focused training sessions for staff.

The information system for tracking pupils' progress is improving. Leaders are beginning to analyse achievement information to identify which pupils are making

good progress and those who are falling behind. You recognise there is more work to do to help all teachers, teaching assistants and governors develop a comprehensive understanding of achievement data.

You are working closely the local authority to update your action plan. The plan pinpoints how leaders will address the key priorities for improvement, and includes clear milestones and roles and responsibilities. The success criteria do not give sufficient detail about achievement targets for different groups of pupils.

Governors are receptive to advice. They know they need to develop a better understanding of achievement information and ask more demanding questions about the typicality of teaching over time. Governors are reviewing the effectiveness of different committees and seeking additional training from the local authority and through the imminent partnership work with a local good primary school. Governors understand their strategic role in driving improvement, are checking the impact of the pupil premium funding and are supporting senior leaders to refine the action plan. Governors are reviewing their skills and devising a plan to secure better governance.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is well-supported by the local authority. Firm plans are in place to partner the school with St John's Angell Town Church of England Primary School, so that leaders and governors have regular support. The local authority is providing training for governors to develop their questioning skills and how to interpret and compare nationally published data with in-school information. The monitoring board has good understanding of the current strengths and areas requiring improvement and offers a good balance of tough questioning and guidance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Lambeth and the Diocese of Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector